

Belying The Most Common Myths About The Benefits Of Hospice Care



By Melissa Weidman

Hospice services are often called the best kept secret in health care.

Actually, the Medicare Hospice Benefit was established in 1983 to provide Medicare beneficiaries with access to high-quality patient-centered care for people facing a life-limiting illness and ease the physical, emotional and spiritual demands of patients and their families experiencing the impact of serious illness and loss.

Eligibility is determined by doctors agreeing that there is a likely prognosis of six months or less, although it can be extended for as long as that likelihood exists. However, out of the nearly two million people who receive hospice care each year, only half receive care for three days or less.

Too often, however, this unique service is not being utilized to its fullest by those who need it most. And why is this so?

To those who work in the field, it's because they hear so many misperceptions from both medical professionals and consumers. Ellen McCabe, director of professional education for Hope

Hospice, points out that "the sooner we are brought in, the more we can do to enhance quality of life and care for all involved. Once they realize the full range of the benefit, they count on us as part of their continuum of care."

Following are some of the most common myths that she and her colleagues hear, along with an explanation of what's really the case:

MYTH #1

Hospice care runs out after six months. Hospice Medicare guidelines do state that a patient must be certified by doctors as having six months or less to live. However, at the end of that time, patients may continue care as long as they still meet the medical criteria and can be recertified on a regular basis.

MYTH #2

To be eligible for hospice, I have to be in the final stages of dying. Hospice patients and families receive care for an unlimited amount of time, depending upon the course of the illness. Patients may continue to receive hospice services, as long as they are certified as eligible. Recent studies show that many patients receiving hospice care may live longer than those receiving standard care based on a more curative model.

MYTH #3

I have to wait until my doctor says I am eligible for hospice. Anyone can call any time to inquire about eligibility. No need to wait for the doctor to bring it up. In fact, the best time to get information is before there is a crisis.

MYTH #4

If I choose hospice care, I have to leave my home. Hospice care is provided wherever patients may be: in their own or a family member's home, nursing home, hospital or assisted living facility. A family member usually handles routine care, with hospice staff providing regular visits and on call 24-7.

MYTH #5

Hospice means giving up hope. To the contrary, hospice brings hope by providing medical, social and spiritual support. This helps patients to live pain-free and helps caregivers enjoy the time they have with their loved ones.

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